



Dear Regional Council Members and Staff:

The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on where we stand in our progress to measure impact and account for the work of First Things First (FTF). This includes our ability to have solid data from which to base our decisions.

As many of you are aware, we collect data at three levels. FTF collects numerous data from grantees on a quarterly basis. As we continue to finish the development of our IT systems, reporting is more timely and thorough. Additional analysis will occur on the data as we build our capacity. Biannual needs and assets assessments are also conducted regionally and statewide. Each year, we get a little closer to painting a more robust picture of the status of young children and their families across the state. Our third statewide needs and assets report will be out in December and will provide a county by county snapshot in addition to the statewide roll up data.

On a secondary level, we have worked in partnership with regional partnership councils across the state to study specific programmatic approaches funded through FTF and to collect information in specific strategy areas. Historic studies include: "Arizona Early Childhood Coordination and Collaboration: A Baseline Report", "A Decade of Data: The Compensation and Credentials of Arizona's Early Child Care and Education Workforce", "Family and Community Survey on Early Childhood", as well as two "Building Bright Futures" needs and assets reports. These reports can be found on our website at <http://www.azftf.gov/whoweare/board/pages/reportsandpubs.aspx>. Additionally, there are currently three studies underway: the second Family and Community Survey to provide updated data from the baseline in 2008 (expected release April 2012); the Child Care Demand and Capacity Study (demand study results expected release is October 2011 and capacity study results expected release is October 2012); and, the Parent Kit Study (expected release July 2012).

Finally, our board and regional councils are deeply committed to looking at child wellbeing and outcomes over time. This type of work is more longitudinal in nature and doesn't specifically call out one programmatic approach, but rather studies the overall early childhood system. To that end, after a year of stakeholder work and input, the State board last month adopted the 10 School Readiness Indicators which FTF will use to benchmark progress (see attached).

Additionally, we have been under contract with a tri-university consortium (The University of

Arizona, Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University) for the past three years on three related studies—the Arizona Kindergarten Readiness Study, the Longitudinal Child Study of Arizona, and the Family and Community Case Studies.

Our contract with the consortium ended on August 31, 2011, and the external studies will not continue. FTF is working closely with the consortium on a smooth conclusion, to assure security and confidentiality of the data already collected and a transfer of data to FTF. The First Things First board has determined to place further external evaluation efforts on hold while we seek independent review and expertise for the following:

- a. Assess the data and analyses FTF has received to date and the alignment with FTF's overall research and evaluation goals;
- b. Provide recommendations to the board on the best approach to evaluating system level outcomes;
- c. Guide the specific development of a plan for next steps.

At the September 2011 meeting, the board will be asked to review and approve the members of the FTF Research and Evaluation National Advisory Panel. The panel will be charged with reporting their findings to the board by the June 2012 board meeting. The panel will be led by Dr. John M. Love, who has had a long and distinguished career as a researcher. He retired at the end of 2010 after 18 years with Mathematica Policy Research, where he was a senior fellow and area leader for early childhood research. He has been involved in teaching, research and evaluation studies of programs for children birth to age 5 and their families since the mid -1960's. I have attached his full resume for review.

This pause in our quest for strong longitudinal, system level data will give us an opportunity to reflect on the data that has been gathered to date and ensure that there is an alignment moving forward. Given the critical role of evaluation in both decision-making and accountability – as well as the resources FTF invests to ensure robust evaluation of our programs, our system and their impact – we believe this panel's work is essential.

Either I or Dr. Amy Kemp, our Senior Director for Research and Evaluation, stand ready to answer any questions you may have. I thank you for your continued commitment to our shared vision of ensuring every child in Arizona starts school ready to succeed. Having data that demonstrate the impact our collective commitment is having on school readiness in Arizona is paramount to our success – as regional councils, as a statewide organization and as an early childhood system.

Sincerely,

Rhian Evans Allvin
Chief Executive Officer